Checklist for Evaluating Dark Psychology in a Game

Use this checklist to assess whether a game incorporates elements of dark psychology and to determine how well designed or ethical the game is. For each criterion, answer **Yes** or **No** to understand the presence of manipulative techniques and overall game quality.

Indicators	**Yes**	**No**
Dark Psychology Indicators		
1. Variable Rewards System • Are rewards randomized, with chances to receive rare items or upgrades (e.g., loot boxes, gacha mechanics)? • Are rewards accompanied by visually or audibly stimulating effects to enhance excitement?		
2. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) • Does the game include limited time offers, events, or rewards that pressure you to act quickly? • Are exclusive items or rewards locked behind tight timeframes or excessive grind requirements?		
3. Progression Anchoring • Is early gameplay fast and rewarding but becomes increasingly grind heavy over time? • Are there monetization options to bypass difficult or slow progression?		
4. Pay to Win Elements • Does spending money provide a direct advantage over other players? • Are "time saver" purchases offered to avoid grinding or resource gathering?		
5. Skinner Box Mechanics • Are repetitive tasks (e.g., grinding, daily quests) used to keep players engaged for small incremental rewards? • Are there daily login rewards or streak systems to encourage habitual play?		
6. Social Pressure • Does the game use leaderboards, guild rankings, or cooperative challenges to create competitive pressure? • Are achievements or purchases prominently displayed to create envy or a sense of inadequacy?		
7. Illusion of Control • Are randomized mechanics presented as skill based to give a false sense of mastery? • Does the game emphasize meaningless choices to make players feel in control?		
8. Loss Aversion • Are penalties for inaction (e.g., missed bonuses, degrading resources) used to force continuous play? • Does the game make you feel you will "lose progress" unless you pay or engage frequently?		
9. Hyper Personalization • Are offers, ads, or challenges tailored to your playstyle or spending habits? • Does the game track your behavior to encourage more play or spending?		
Ethical Design Indicators		
1. Reward Transparency • Are reward systems fully explained, including drop rates for randomized items? • Are rewards tied to skill, effort, or exploration rather than chance?		

Indicators	Yes	No
2. Fair Progression • Is the game balanced so progression is possible without excessive grind or monetary investment? • Does the game avoid introducing difficulty spikes designed to pressure spending?		
3. Skill Based Challenges • Are the challenges in the game primarily based on player skill rather than chance or spending? • Does the game offer meaningful skill development or learning opportunities?		
4. Freedom of Play • Can players enjoy the game at their own pace without time based pressures? • Is there a clear distinction between optional content and core gameplay?		
5. Non Exploitative Monetization • Are in game purchases limited to cosmetics or optional extras that do not affect gameplay? • Is the game fully functional and enjoyable without spending money?		
6. Respect for Player Time • Does the game respect player time by avoiding repetitive or trivial tasks? • Are rewards appropriately scaled to the time and effort invested?		
7. Transparency in Social Systems • Are social mechanics (e.g., leaderboards, guilds) designed to foster collaboration over competition? • Is peer pressure minimized, with an emphasis on personal achievement?		
8. No Psychological Penalties • Does the game avoid penalizing players for not logging in daily or missing events? • Are there no negative consequences (e.g., resource decay) for taking breaks?		
9. Focus on Enjoyment and Narrative • Does the game prioritize delivering an engaging and meaningful experience over retention metrics? • Is storytelling or creativity emphasized over monetization driven features?		

Scoring Guidelines

	Score
Dark Psychology Indicators: 0–3 Yes: Minimal use of manipulative techniques. Likely a well balanced or ethical game. 4–6 Yes: Moderate use of dark psychology. Be cautious of potential exploitative elements. 7–9 Yes: High use of manipulative strategies. The game is likely exploitative.	
Ethical Design Indicators: 7–9 Yes: Strong ethical design, prioritizing player experience and fairness. 4–6 Yes: Moderate ethical design. Some areas may require improvement. 0–3 Yes: Poor ethical design. Likely prioritizes monetization over player well being.	

By balancing the dark psychology and ethical design scores, you can determine whether a game is enjoyable, fair, and respectful of its players, or if it leans heavily on manipulative practices.